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THE GERMAIN FAMILY OF GOLDSMITHS.

BY DR. J. STOCKBAUER.



CANDELABRUM IN GOLD, DESIGNED BY THOMAS GERMAIN.
(Collection of Baron Pichon)

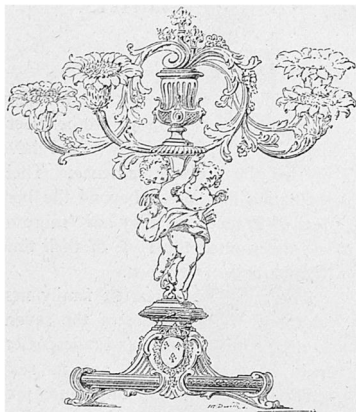
OF all the goldsmiths of the past two centuries, the French brothers Germain are the best known and have exerted the greatest influence. Their reputation has spread beyond the borders of France, and they have more or less determined the style of their time in gold- and silver-work.

The name of this artist family first appeared in the middle of the seventeenth century. In 1643 François Germain became a master, and in 1655 another goldsmith of the name produced his masterpiece. François Germain died in 1676. He left a son Pierre, who in 1669 had become master. Pierre soon developed such remarkable talent that the minister Colbert recommended him to the king. He made the golden cover for the book in which the victories

of Louis XIV. are described, and displayed great ability in this work, which, according to the custom of that time, secured him a dwelling in the Louvre. Among his other works was a costly golden frame for a portrait of the king, which Bénard had painted. In the year 1680 he received orders for ornamental work for the castle of Versailles, as well as others from the court, the dauphin, and the royal princes.

All these treasures, however, were soon destroyed, and not one of them is now in existence. Pressed for money, the king, with a caprice not easily understood, ordered all these works of art to be melted. We can only regret this useless expedient, for even such costly works of art cannot save a state. The small amount that they can supply can make up no deficit, but the realm is robbed of far more valuable riches than can generally be replaced; such measures destroy the evidences of a great past, and are almost a crime. The desire to destroy is born in all governments, and for it there are various reasons. Charles IV. ordered the destruction of the royal dwellings in order to use the material in building palaces of another fashion and far inferior to the old ones in beauty and splendor. Later, the Directory, when in want of money, allowed the one hun-

dred and eighty Gobelin tapestries of the Renaissance period to be destroyed in order to get the gold from the gold



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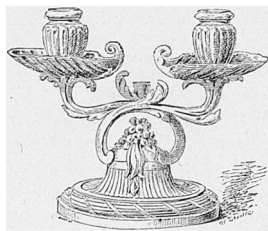
thread used in them. People did not then realize that love for the art-works of the past is inseparable from the love of the father-land.

Pierre Germain was also an accomplished maker of medallions, and one of these with a bust of the king is still preserved in the National Library at Paris. He died in the prime of life, thirty-nine years old, in 1684, leaving a widow and seven small children, but no fortune.

His oldest son, Thomas, was eleven years old at the time of his father's death. He with the rest of his brothers and sisters was taken care of by the grandfather; his guardian cultivated his artistic tastes and had him taught drawing. His progress was so considerable that the minister Louvois secured him a chance to enter the French

Academy at Rome. His patron soon died, and he was again thrown upon his own resources. He became the pupil of a Roman goldsmith, and secured the friendship of the artist Legros, who was at work upon an altar for the church of the Jesuits, and who proposed to Thomas Germain to work upon the figures. This brought him reputation and fame: he was employed by the Grand Duke Cosmo III. in Florence, and received a commission to build a church in Leghorn.

At the earnest request of his mother, he returned, after thirteen years of absence, to Paris. His first work was the execution of a censer for the chapel of Fontainebleau: the work pleased the king, but he had no new orders. The old prosperity had not come back to France, and the new articles of faience rivalled the old silver tea-services and vessels. Not until after the death of Louis XIV. do we find Thomas Germain again employed by the court. Among the new appliances of luxury the articles for the toilet took an important



FLAMBEAU FOR BUREAU, BY THOMAS GERMAIN.
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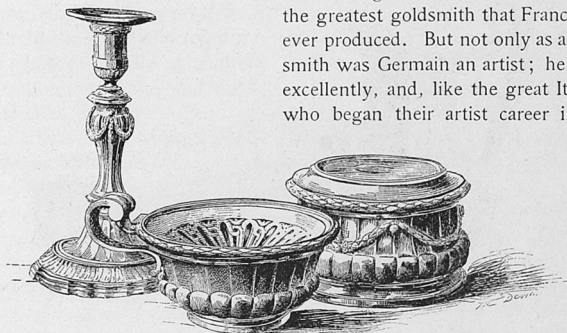
place. Germain was considered the foremost master in the production of such luxuries, and nearly all monarchs

ordered them of him. Often, according to the testimony of writers of that time, a set consisted of as many as twenty-four pieces. It had bottles, goblet, and cup, cups to use in cleaning the teeth, pomade-boxes, small boxes, candlesticks, brushes, combs, powder, knives, etc.

Louis XV. overwhelmed him with greater and greater orders. He ordered a dressing-case of twenty-six pieces, a table-service, a medicine-chest, and

grew apace, and he became a member of the Paris town council and attained the dignity of judge. He died in 1746, sixty-five years old.

Thomas Germain had a many-sided artist nature. Never falling into exaggeration, he composed his works in a manner as simple as it was artistic, and among all the masters who bequeathed the artistic methods of Louis XIV. to his successors no one was so influential as he. His contemporaries acknowledged this fact, and called him the greatest goldsmith that France had ever produced. But not only as a goldsmith was Germain an artist; he drew excellently, and, like the great Italians who began their artist career in the



TOILET-SERVICE IN SILVER-GILT, BY FRANÇOIS-THOMAS GERMAIN.

(In the possession of the Grand Duke Alexis)

many other things. When the dauphin had his own establishment, Germain made the silver service; and the princes and princesses sent him their orders. Works especially worthy of mention are a table which the king sent as a present to the Sultan Mohammed I., valued, with its ornaments, at 237,960 livres, the toilet-case of the dauphiness, and two golden candelabra at Versailles. The latter cost the considerable sum of 110,600 livres.

He had for a long time a dwelling in the Louvre, and his mother lived to see the height of his glory. His fame

workshops of the goldsmiths, he was an accomplished architect. The chapel of St. Louis in the Louvre is his work, and there he lies buried.

Of the sons of Thomas Germain, the fourth, François-Thomas, became the best known. He was twenty-two years old at the death of his father, and became master in 1748. Even in the lifetime of his father the king had promised that he should continue living in the Louvre.

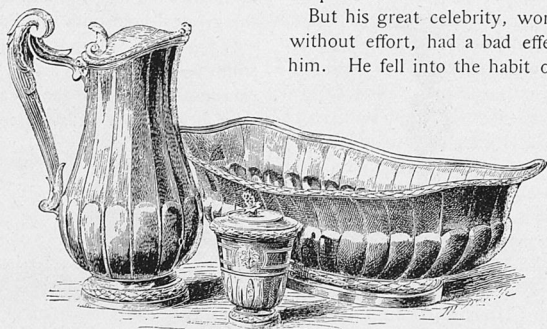
No artist ever commenced his career under such favorable circumstances as François-Thomas Germain. Fame and

reputation, which two generations, with labor and patience, effort and industry, had heaped upon the name of Germain, descended upon him, and all that he had to do was to keep them. Sad to say, he did not do so, as we shall soon see.

At first he was busy in completing the unfinished work of his father; then came orders from all sides, in the execution of which he employed from sixty to eighty assistants,—a very unusual

as well as many smaller articles,—salt-cellars, mirrors, etc. The Portuguese court ordered table-services, toilet articles, in all over three thousand items. A single table-service cost the great sum of 601,000 livres. Besides these large orders, he did much work for the nobility. Madame de Mortemarte, Madame de Livry, the Duke and Duchess of Orleans, the Countess of Toulouse, the Duke de Chevreuse, the Cardinal de Luynes, etc., were among his patrons.

But his great celebrity, won almost without effort, had a bad effect upon him. He fell into the habit of taking



TOILET-SERVICE IN SILVER-GILT, BY FRANÇOIS-THOMAS GERMAIN.
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number for those times. He also discovered an improved method of treating his materials, which he kept secret. The fame of François Germain's skill was universal. Upon all sides he was an authority in matters pertaining to the goldsmith's art. There is a book still in existence, with eleven pages in small handwriting, showing orders which he had executed for the French court. Not only the French but foreign courts honored the master with their confidence. The Empress Elizabeth of Russia ordered three large table-services of him, seventy centimetres high,

large orders, but he had not the ability to direct his numerous workmen. He was without order, and many of them stole from him. Besides, he lived in great style, and the fashion prevailing at the French court for affairs of gallantry was not without its influence upon the court goldsmith. He also had dear friends whom he chose from the theatre. Thanks to their assistance, he became burdened with debts of two and one-half million francs.

To free himself from his disagreeable position he found a method then but little known. He formed, in conjunc-

tion with several people about the court, a company with a nominal capital of 850,000 livres. He contributed all his tools, materials, half-finished and completed wares, models, etc., for a sum of 50,000 livres, although, according to his own confession, they were worth 200,000 livres. According to the contract, the services of his workmen were transferred to the company. He was to make no new debts, and his accounts were to be examined by a member of the company. Unfortunately, Germain did not confess all his debts, his creditors became pressing, and attached the contents of his private dwelling in the Louvre, and on the 27th of June, 1765, he was declared bankrupt. The company was dissolved at the urgent petition of the goldsmiths, and Germain went back to his former pupil, Dapché. Here he received commissions from the Portuguese court, but his creditors claimed his work. He spread announcements far and wide of a special exhibition of his works, and invited visitors to his studio; at last, in 1768, he went to England to arrange his affairs, —unfortunately, with no good result.

Returning to Paris, he spent the following year in repeated solicitations for his old privileges in the Louvre. Louis

XV. was inexorable, and even Louis XVI. was in this matter inaccessible. Various petitions to influential people, even to Voltaire, led to nothing. When he saw at last that his hopes were vain, he demanded two costly articles, a piece of furniture and a fire-set, which he had left behind in the Louvre. After 1780 there appears to be no mention of him. He died in 1791, sixty-three years old. His wife died before him, and he appears to have left no children.

Besides this family of goldsmiths, there was another of the same name, of whom Pierre Germain was well known. He became a master in 1744, and owes his fame largely to his work, "Elements of the Goldsmith's Art," which even now has a great reputation. It is an excellent text- and instruction-book for goldsmiths.

In 1751 he published a book called "The Book of Ornaments." The plates for this, as well as those of the other work, were engraved by Pasquier. His reputation must have been considerable, for in 1774 he was chief of the company of goldsmiths. He died in 1783. He never reached the fame of the other Germaines. His knowledge was limited, as the inventory of the works which he left will show.



PLATE IN SILVER-GILT, WITH THE ARMS OF PORTUGAL, BY FRANÇOIS-THOMAS GERMAIN.